

The Framers provided a series of steps required to amend the Constitution, and this process should not be taken lightly. This resolution requires the support of a two-thirds majority of the Senate and the House and subsequent ratification by three-quarters of the States. I recognize the challenges of that process, but I believe this is a discussion and debate that Congress and the American people should have.

We must act. We must act now to restore Americans' faith in our political electoral process. I urge my colleagues to support this amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GOODWIN). The majority leader is recognized.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, if the time is limited to 15 minutes, I will use lead time to complete my statement.

Mr. President, my friend the Republican leader talked about a number of things in his presentation, all the time making remarks such as "reading the bill caused unrestrained laughter." Well, 85 percent of the American people support this legislation.

Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis offered disclosure and transparency as the antidote to swollen corporate influence. Sunlight, he said, is "the best of disinfectants." The man who would replace him on the Supreme Court shed light on the importance of the individual's vote, the voice that anchors our democracy. William O. Douglas, who served on the bench longer than any other Justice, said that the right to vote means more than simply the right to pull a lever on election day. He said it also means "the right to have the vote counted at full value, without dilution or discount." Both Brandeis and Douglas were right. These two Justices' observations should guide us as we correct an error made by today's Supreme Court—the Roberts Court—when it wrongly ruled in January that corporations, special interests, and foreign governments can flood America's political system with contributions in unlimited amounts and in secrecy. That decision was wrong.

The campaign advertisements at issue in the case, *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, and in the bill before us, the DISCLOSE Act, are presumably about giving the electorate the information it needs to make an informed choice. But that information must also include its source because an open political process demands the disclosure of who is paying the bills. We are all agreed that voters can believe, criticize, or support any ad they wish, but a citizen cannot responsibly do any of that if he doesn't know how the ad found its way into his living room.

Our votes are the most precious part of our democracy. If someone is going to such great lengths to convince us how to use it, should we not at least know their names? Put differently, why would we let those who go to such great lengths to conceal their names—and those who try to protect them by

blocking this bill—dilute or manipulate our voices?

The principle behind the bill is a simple belief that neither the American voter at home nor the democratic process at large benefits from campaigns funded by secret sponsors who are hidden from public view. Quite the opposite, in fact; such secrecy is harmful because it deliberately keeps from voters the identity of those trying to influence their choices and sway our elections.

This is also about trust and confidence in our democracy. Whenever the voice of the corporation is the loudest, the voice of the citizen is harder to hear. If citizens don't have reason to trust the electoral process, voters have little reason to trust the outcome of the election, and constituents ultimately have no reason to trust their elected government.

This Supreme Court case and this piece of legislation are not only about campaign checks; it is also about checks and balances. The Senate is not reversing or circumventing the Court's ruling; we are only bringing back transparency, accountability, and fairness to the system so it can work best for the people it serves. We are doing that in three ways.

First, this bill says that if you are a foreign corporation or a foreign Government, you can't spend money in American elections.

Second, it says if you are a company that benefited from TARP—the emergency program that kept our largest institutions and our economy afloat—you can't turn around and give those taxpayer dollars to a political candidate.

Third, to prevent both the possibility and the perception of a pay-to-play scheme, it says that if you are a government contractor, you cannot contribute to campaigns either.

These three elements are written primarily to protect voters, but voters are not the only ones who will benefit. If you are a shareholder of a company rich enough to put a campaign ad on television, wouldn't you want to know how it is using your investment and spending your money? Of course.

CEOs and special interests can run all the ads they want today, and after the DISCLOSE Act is law they will still be able to do that. That is their right. The difference is that our bill says you just can't pay for an ad; they have to stand by that ad also. This new law will not stifle anybody's speech or their ability to advertise; it merely requires them to do so in the open.

What could be more patriotic and less partisan than protecting a person's vote and all the information that goes into that decision?

The desire for greater real-time disclosure of election spending was not long ago a bipartisan concept. It is incredible that we now have to struggle to find a supermajority—60 Senators—even just to debate a bill the principles of which both parties once supported

and that 9 in 10 Americans want us to pass.

What else is new?

When we fought to protect every American's right to afford good health, the other side jumped to the defense of corporate America and the special interests in the insurance racket.

When we fought to protect Americans from the unchecked greed in the financial industry—recklessness—that cost 8 million Americans jobs and nearly collapsed our economy, the other side jumped to the defense of corporate America and special interests—this time, those on Wall Street.

When we fought to hold BP accountable for its negligence, the other side jumped to the defense of the corporation responsible for the greatest man-made environmental disaster in history, going so far as to apologize to its now-ousted CEO.

When we ran to the side of millions who lost their jobs in the recession and exhausted their unemployment insurance, while they searched for hard-to-find jobs, the other side argued that what our economy needed was more tax breaks for multimillionaires.

On the stimulus bill, 93 percent of the Republicans voted against it in the Senate. On the unemployment insurance extension, 88 percent of the Republicans voted against that. On Americans' jobs and closing tax loopholes, 86 percent of the Republicans voted against that. On the health care bill, 100 percent of the Republicans voted against it. On the HIRE Act, 68 percent of Republicans voted against. Even on cash for clunkers—which was, by all estimates, a great success—82 percent of the Republicans voted against it.

This issue is no different than those I went through. The bill asks us to put the people before the special interests. It asks us to ensure that an individual's vote speaks louder than the deep pockets of the powerful.

It asks us this so the next time a health insurance company or a big Wall Street bank or a major oil company or any other special interest puts a campaign ad on the air, everyone will know who did it. It will make sure viewers can consider the source as they consider their vote.

Americans have fought so hard and at so great a price to ensure the voting rights of every individual. We have removed obstacles between people and the ballot box, removed corruption from the campaign process, and gone to great lengths to encourage everyone to participate on election day.

Why would we diminish a right that was so hard won? Why would we go backward?

This new law will return our popular elections to the people by limiting anyone's ability to dilute a citizen's power and by letting in the sunlight that disinfects our democracy.

Who could oppose that? The only ones fearful of transparency are those with something to hide. That is what this legislation is all about.